

BRIEFING PAPER – Reflective Practice

What is Reflective Practice Is?

Reflective practice is deemed to be part of the core values of professionals particularly of those within education, health and social care.

Professionals would think about how they had engaged with their clients during sessions and look at what had worked well and not so well and what could be learned from sessions for next time. (University of Cambridge, nd and Brock, 2015)

Although the University of Cambridge (nd) offers Schon's definition for reflective practice they go further to suggest that this is not an isolated process but is in fact part of a much larger and more personal process and that people will look at it differently depending on their own cultural and personal circumstance.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning.

- Donald Schon

Diagram 1:
Reflective Practice
(University of Cambridge, nd)

Lindon and Trodd (2016) and Pacey (2016) believe that reflective practice needs serious thought and consideration of current practice including critical thinking, challenging and modifying practice. This leads practitioners to more informed decisions about strengths and areas of learning. However Lindon and Trodd also recognise that this can be challenging when faced with practitioners who may resort to the quickest or easiest option rather than how the children may experience the event itself.

Why Reflective Practice?

The necessity to improve practice in the early years is embedded in the Rights of the Child (Children in Wales 2021), this specifically states that skilled practitioners should be able to meet a child's needs using observation and reflective practice. Firstly practitioners must understand what reflective practice is and how it can be done successfully to improve not only their own knowledge and understanding but also to have better outcomes for the child. Social Care Wales (2017) further

suggests that fostering an environment that offers time for reflective practice and ensuring its part of the routine will create a shift in practice and behaviours which in turn offer a change in results.

It can also redefine challenges as learning opportunities and ensure that practitioners be aware of and understand a child's personal circumstances and cultural background. This will benefit practice and teachings allowing practitioners to personalise their planning and activities for learning. (Education Wales, 2022 and Hildabrand *et al.*, 2024)

Campbell- Barr and Leeson (2019, pg., 105) agree and further suggests that when using reflective practice it enables any practitioner to hone their skills and progress further to become an attentive and imaginative professional.

Amini Virmani *et al* (2020, pg., 1052-1070) also found that early childhood practitioners who were using reflective practice believed that it had had a direct impact on the children's developmental outcomes and social and emotional development.

However if reflective practice is not taught in a robust and systematic way it can often be seen to be superficial and can often lack clarity. Early years practitioners need training and support from a mentor or professional supervisor to be able to carry out purposeful and meaningful reflective practice. In conjunction work places need to model reflective practice and ensure regular times for shared collaboration offering a place to check in with colleagues. Doing this can create a supportive environment and can further support with new ideas for practice and shared ownership of responsibility and success (Brock, 2015 and Social Care Wales 2017).

The Theory

Reflective theory and practice have been written about extensively. Leading this was Dewey who's main ideas and principles centred on child centred learning using what we know and understand about the child to support our practice and the child's learning. Dewey is often considered as one of the founding leaders of reflective practice however current understanding of the concept suggests that the more modern foundations are with Schon (Ryder and Downs 2022).

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Schon examined both reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection in action looked at how experienced practitioners responded in real

time, using their knowledge and understanding to be able to feel their way through an activity or event as opposed to reflection on action where a practitioner would reflect after the event has occurred. Reflection on action can also happen in discussion with another colleague or within supervision. Wilson, T (2016, pg., 33)

Brookfield (2017) adds that reflective practice happens when we build it into everyday teachings ensuring it becomes habit aiding practitioners to make more informed decisions about how to support children and ensure that what we are actually teaching has an effect.

Analysis of modules

The Schon Reflective Model

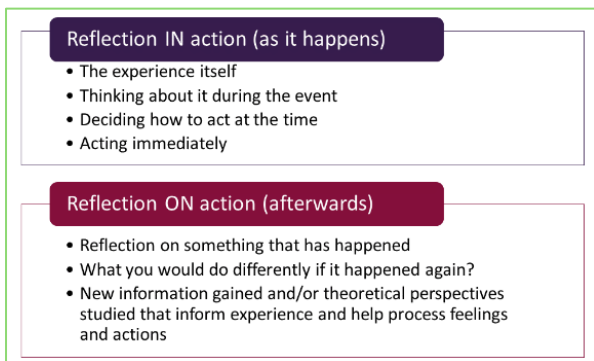


Diagram 2: Reflective Writing: Schon (University of Hull, 2024)

Schon's work has played a critical role in raising awareness of reflective practice and has highlighted that practitioners should be using it to be better at what they do. By using reflective practice Schon believes that practitioners will be able to apply what they have already learnt to future experiences. However Ryder and Downs (2022) suggest that Greenwood (1993) offers the idea that reflection-before-action also needs to be considered and is quite often forgotten about.

Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2019, pg., 110-111) state that Schon goes further to encourage practitioners to consider their own assumptions and prejudice which may go unnoticed and calls this technical rationality. Without this practitioners may in fact offer poor and in some cases even dangerous practice.

Kleinheksel, A. J *et al* (2023) claim that Schon's reflection on action is one of the most used models by the more novice practitioner while reflection in action is carried out by the more experienced practitioner.

Ryder and Downs (2022) recognise that Schons work is an essential precursor to Kolbs s Experiential Learning Cycle.

Kolb's Cycle of Reflective Practice

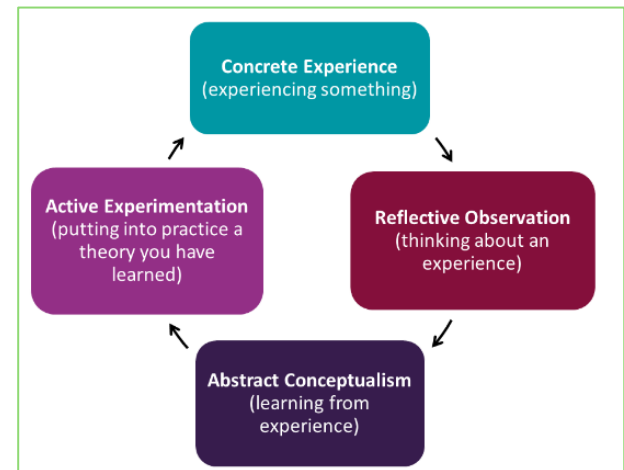


Diagram 3: Reflective Writing: Kolb (University of Hull, 2024)

Kolbs model is based on how people learn and focuses on learning through actual experience. It has four areas and offers what appears to be a more structured approach to reflection. It offers a continuous cycle where you work on one stage at a time. This then leads you to new ideas and experiences. In agreement with Schon it begins with an event or an experience either new or old. (University of Cambridge, nd and University of Hull, 2024)

Ryder and Downs (2022) recognise that Kolbs Experiential Learning model is one of the most significant and most used models to date. However they also argue that it can be deemed too simplistic in its design to meet the demands of the changes within the modern world.

Summary

Reflective practice is essential in the early years. Not only due to it being enshrined in law but by also encouraging critical evaluation of skills which lead to knowledgeable, thoughtful, imaginative and attentive professionals .